

A HATCHET AND A TREE

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The following is by Buddy Smith, *Heads Up!* July 6, 2012, smiletex@bigpond.net.au --

You can never go back. No, that's not exactly correct, is it? What I meant to say is, "You can never turn the clock back so that when you do go back home, you find things the same as they were when you were there last." Most of us pastors remember the churches we led years ago and we would like to go back and find things the same. But they never are!

Without entering into an discussion over whether Time is linear or cyclic, it is expedient for us to believe that Time moves on. Noah took the cover off the ark, and the world was changed. It no longer looked, smelled, or sounded the same. Moses went back to Egypt after forty years away, and it was all changed. The Pharaoh did not remember Joseph's contribution to Egypt's well being, and refused to even acknowledge the God who sent the dreams that rescued them from destruction previously. Even in the book of Acts time moved on. When Peter was imprisoned and condemned in Acts 12 the church prayed without ceasing. Paul and Barnabas were there when it happened. But by the time Paul went back to Jerusalem in chapter 21 much had changed. Now the Jewish law keepers were in the church and there were no more all night prayer meetings for imprisoned apostles. We find no indication that the church was the least bit concerned that Paul was in jail. It all changes, doesn't it? Well, that settles it. Nothing ever stays the same.

Then again, some things DO stay the same. Some things are unchanging and immutable. God never changes. His Word is settled and preserved and totally unalterable. And believing prayer still brings answers from God. And the Holy Spirit still convicts of sin and blesses faithfulness. And the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth! God is still on the throne. And he says,

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:25 - 28).

In a shaky and changing world it is good for us to read these verses often. Much is changing today and even the heavens will someday be shaken BUT there are things which cannot be shaken and they will remain! No matter what!

The little hillbilly church I shepherded in my first pastorate is still there. It's had its ups and downs, some before I came, some while I was there, and some after I left. Nothing stayed the same. People moved on. Most of the ones we knew are dead and buried, and their children are old people now. Winds of strange doctrines have blown in at the front door and out the back door. Strange doctrines and sound doctrines struggled for supremacy again and again. But God is still on the throne!

More than twenty years passed after my pastorate there. We moved to Australia and had been home twice on furlough. In 1990 we were early for an evening service at a missions conference at _____ Baptist Church, about twenty miles down the road from Grace Baptist Church, where I first pastored. A young couple with several children came in before the meeting and we started talking. His name was Donny. ... I asked where he came to Christ, and he told me it was at the little church on top of the hill over there. I asked if it was Grace Baptist Church, and he said it was. I asked how long he had been saved and he told me it was in 1966. His words triggered a rush of memories, and all of a sudden I knew who he was. So I asked him, "Donny, did you go to Sunday School at Grace Baptist?" He nodded and said, "Yes, I did." Did you ever ride in an old panel truck that was used to pick up kids?" Again, he nodded. I asked him, "Did you live in a little house on the side of a hill with a little driveway that came up from the valley and went out at the top of the hill?" He smiled as he remembered his boyhood home. And then I asked, "Did you ever have to chop a tree down to go to Sunday School?" Donny laughed out loud and grabbed me and hugged me. And we dredged up all the memories of that Sunday when, to make room for a car coming down his drive from the top of the hill, I reversed that old panel truck into a little footpath, and when the car passed, I tried to follow it down the hill and couldn't turn sharply enough. I had driven over the edge of the drive and was headed downhill through the scrub toward the road below. We would have made it, but there was a sapling there and it stopped us dead. We couldn't reverse up the hill, and we couldn't go downhill because we were up against that sapling. So I asked little Donny, "You got a hatchet up at the house?" And in just a few minutes we had chopped the sapling down, returned the hatchet, slid down the hill to the road and headed off for Sunday School. I think that was the Sunday Donny called on the Lord.

I learned some lessons that day.

It pays to go out of your way to bring people to hear the gospel.
Little people are worth every effort we make to win them to Christ.
Don't ever give up.
If you are not a very good driver, carry a hatchet.

And remember, some things never change!

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